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AUTHOR Weiss, Rhonda; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents, the guide provides an introduction to learning disabilities, the programs and services available to the learning disabled child through the public schools, the rights of parent and child, as well as suggestions for helping and advocating for the child. The first chapter considers characteristics of learning disabilities, cause, and outlook. Referral, evaluation, and decision making at a staffing (which includes the parent) are considered next. The third chapter explains what the individualized education program (IEP) must contain, the IEP conference, and IEP reviews. Varieties of programs are discussed in the fourth chapter and include the regular education program, the resource teaching program, and self-contained class, and special school placement. Specific parental and student rights in the areas of consent, notice, evaluation, least restrictive environment, records, and hearings are considered next. Suggestions to parents advocating for their child cover the initial staffing and IEP meeting, annual IEP review meetings, communicating with professionals, and questions parents should ask. Tips for parents at home are offered next followed by suggestions for planning for after high school. The final chapter lists resources and references including government agencies, organizations, and information sources. A glossary of frequently used abbreviations is also provided. (DB)

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A Parent's Guide to Learning Disabilities

Iowa Department of Education

EC 211041

I AM

I AM—

First of all, a child,
A fresh-faced, clear-eyed, intelligent child.

I WANT—

To be liked by others, just as I like them.
To excel, to learn, to grow.
To put on paper all the things I store in my mind.
To please my teachers, my parents, myself.

THEY SAY I—

Goof up, show off, space out,
Learn things, then forget them,
Write my name backwards, transpose my numbers, forget my facts,
Am willful, stubborn, naughty or dumb.

I LOSE—

My pencils, papers, and my place,
My books, my lunch ticket, and sometimes my cool,
My teacher's respect, my parents' patience,
My own self-esteem.

I NEED—

Understanding, patience, insight, help,
To learn my capabilities and my limits,
To be assured that I have,
Support from the adults in my life.

I DON'T NEED—

Criticism, rejection, ridicule,
Impossible tasks, goals beyond my reach,
Spirit-crushing workloads.

I AM—

Learning disabled, but first of all,

I AM—

A child,

A fresh-faced, clear-eyed, intelligent child.

Pam Pedersen
1983

WORKING TOGETHER

A Parent's Guide to Learning Disabilities

Authors

Rhonda Weiss
Resource Teacher
Nevada Community School District
Nevada, Iowa

Yvonne Riesen
Parent
Glidden, Iowa

Gail Sullivan Fleig
Consultant
Iowa Department of Education
Des Moines, Iowa

Editor

Jim Reese
Consultant, Learning Disabilities
Iowa Department of Education
Des Moines, Iowa

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Bureau of Special Education

State of Iowa
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Bureau of Special Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

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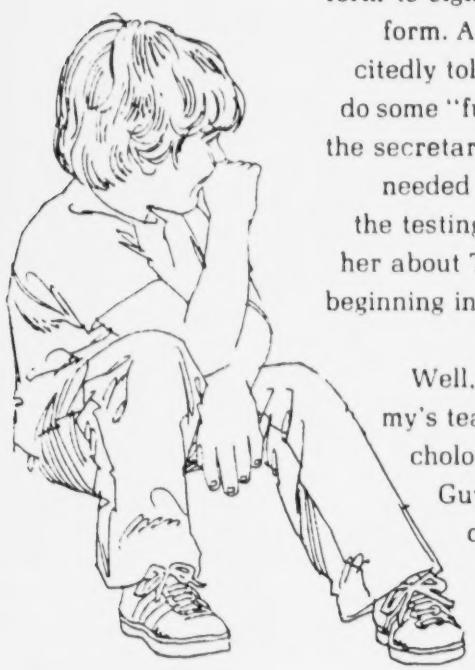
I entered the school slowly, counting each step as I moved up the stairs. My thoughts jumped from one picture to another. I knew Tommy had been having problems keeping up with his classmates in second grade. Bill and I often talked together at night, trying to figure out why Tommy didn't seem to be able to figure out the words in reading or remember them the next day. Telling time was a mystery to him and we had to switch to slip-on shoes since tying laces was also a puzzle to him. Why, we worried, did Tommy have so many problems?

Tommy's teacher, Mrs. Jones, had worked so hard to help him but she was as confused as we were about why Tommy seemed to fall further and further behind. We had often talked together about ways to reach Tommy, but mainly we were concerned about the way Tommy was beginning to feel about himself. "Oh, I'm just dumb, that's all," was Tommy's angry answer when we asked him about a school paper he didn't want to show us.

My thoughts tumbled over each other as I remembered the day Mrs. Jones talked with us about testing Tommy in order to help him with his problems. We agreed, and the school sent us a form to sign for permission to test Tommy. We signed and returned the form. A couple of weeks later, Tommy came home from school and excitedly told us about the friendly man who came to school and had him do some "fun things". He even sent Tommy to get a tablet that he forgot in the secretary's office. This little errand made Tommy feel important and needed and not so "dumb". Tommy seemed quite happy following all the testing. Later the school nurse talked with Bill and me and we told her about Tommy's life at home from the time he was a baby. It was the beginning in our search for answers.



Well, now was the time to talk with the school. There would be Tommy's teacher, the Principal and Mr. (oh what was his name?) the psychologist. All I could think of was what Tommy called him, Mr. Nice Guy. The school had written a letter asking us to be present for a conference or "staffing" about Tommy. Did someone finally have an answer? What could we do to help him? I guess all of us had different pieces of a puzzle to put together. Maybe together we'd have an answer.

**Editor's Note: This story is reprinted with permission from Parent Education - Parent Action, a book developed, printed and distributed by the Center to Assist Parents and Professionals (CAP-P), Des Moines Independent Community School District, Des Moines, Iowa. The Center was a Title IV-C program funded by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction.

I reached for the handle of the door to Room 117, Tommy's Homeroom. Several adults were sitting in little desks placed in a circle. I smiled nervously as Tommy's teacher kindly asked me if I would like to sit next to her. I settled in the second grade chair alongside the other adults, who were equally outsized for the seats. Mr. Gordon (now I remember his name), the psychologist bounced into the room carrying a folder of papers and tugging his tie into place. I smiled, thinking of how often Bill arrives at work in the same manner, hat off his head and tie askew. The school nurse came into the room along with another lady whom she introduced as a learning disabilities teacher.

"A what teacher?" I thought to myself. I was sure that I'd never remember all their names, let alone what their titles were. Most of all I wondered what they had to offer for putting together the puzzle called Tommy. I began to move around in my chair. "What am I doing here? What can I say to these people who know so much more than I? Why isn't Bill here instead of being at the office? Why me? What will they tell me about Tommy? Will I remember everything to tell Bill?"

While my fears and doubts were galloping around inside me, I suddenly thought, "Hey, they're here to help." I swallowed and listened as Mrs. Jones began telling us why we were here. She told about working with Tommy in the classroom and the problems she found in teaching him reading and math. She turned to me and asked me to comment about the problems he had met since starting school. I added what we had seen at home.

Mr. Gordon, the psychologist, then reported his test results. "Tommy," he said, "has many abilities. He scored very high in some areas and quite low in others. He has average intelligence. Tommy does have many abilities and strengths in his learning but we find there are several areas of weakness where we need to help Tommy."

"Okay, then why isn't Tommy learning in school," I blurted out.

"Maybe I can help explain," Mrs. Kaydak, the learning disabilities teacher said as she smiled at me. "First, we know that Tommy is intelligent. He can see and hear well and he has warm and supportive parents." She smiled again and I found myself smiling back. "Second, we know that he has the ability to learn but, for some reason he is not able to achieve in all areas. And last, through observation, we have found the ways in which Tommy learns best and some of the ways he does not learn. When we find a big gap between potential and performance in learning, we feel there is a learning disability."

"But, does this mean Tommy is han-handicapped?" I could hardly say the words. "You said he was a WHAT?"

"A learning disability," she replied. "We have **A**-Abilities and **D**-Disabilities. But remember, the **A** comes before the **D** in the alphabet — **A**-bilities are far greater than **D**-isabilities. For example, Tommy has problems learning to read. I suppose you could say that because it is very difficult for him, he is "handicapped" in learning to read. But, we now know some of the ways he learns best, so we can work together to help Tommy learn to read. Tommy, we find, is a visual learner. That means he learns by seeing the material rather than hearing it. So, we will work with Tommy visually and not force him to learn by sounding out each part of the word. We'll also know that he will learn the material easier in Science or Social Studies by seeing it rather than hearing it. Therefore, we'll work with those teachers to help Tommy learn in those subjects. You see, it is not that Tommy can't learn. It's that he learns in a different way."

"I see." I was beginning to understand. "Tommy can and does learn. We have to know the way to teach him."

"Now, let's see what we can all do together to help Tommy," the teacher spoke again.

Almost as one, we all leaned forward to plan for Tommy. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together. There would be lots of difficult times ahead for Tommy and he would still have many frustrations in school but, it was definitely a beginning. A very good beginning!

This story represents the beginning for one child with learning disabilities and his family. But what about you and your child? What are learning disabilities? What special programs do schools provide for students with learning disabilities? What are your rights? What are your responsibilities? How can you help your child?

This guide was prepared to help you better understand learning disabilities, and the special programs and services available to your child through the public schools. It also includes information regarding your rights, and suggestions for helping and advocating for your child. While it is impossible to include everything about learning disabilities under one cover, we hope the information, suggestions, and resources provided by the guide prove helpful to you - parents of a child with learning disabilities.

Rhonda Meyer Weiss
Learning Disabilities Teacher

Yvonne Riesen
Parent

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING DISABILITIES
OR
WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

The term "learning disability" has become a familiar one in recent years. However, specific learning problems existed long before the term learning disability was commonly accepted. Terms such as word blindness, dyslexia, specific language disorders, minimal brain dysfunction, perceptual handicaps, and neurological impairment have been used to describe specific learning problems throughout the years. In 1975, the Federal government included and defined specific learning disability in the Education of the Handicapped Act, commonly referred to as Public Law 94-142.

A learning disability is a disorder that selectively interferes with an individual's ability to receive, organize, or express information, and affects such functions as attention, memory, perception, language, and thinking. As a result, the individual has significant difficulty in learning to read, write, listen, speak, or do basic mathematical operations. The individual can also have difficulty in the development of social perception and skills, organizational skills, or self-esteem. The disorder is chronic, intrinsic to the individual, and presumed to be due to neurological dysfunction. The disorder is characterized by noticeable strengths and weaknesses in learning, a significant difference between actual and expected performance, and varies in its manifestations and severity from individual to individual.

The problems in learning associated with the disorder are not the result of other handicapping conditions (such as sensory impairments, mental disability or behavior disorders), nor the result of environmental deprivation, cultural difference, insufficient opportunity to learn, inappropriate instruction, or a history of an inconsistent educational program.

Characteristics

Individuals with learning disabilities exhibit a broad variety of characteristics. Most individuals show some of the following characteristics at one time or another. However, an individual with a learning disability usually exhibits a cluster of the characteristics which persist over time:

- short attention span

- poor memory

- difficulty following directions
- poor eye-hand coordination
- poor social perception and judgment
- poor organizational skills
- impulsive
- hyperactive
- difficulty with sequencing
- difficulty discriminating between letters and numbers
- easily distracted
- poor reading skills
- difficulty with spelling and writing
- reverses letters or words
- difficulty telling time
- difficulty telling right from left
- poor fine and/or gross motor skills
- poor self-concept and low self-esteem
- immature speech
- difficulty with basic concepts such as over, under, beside, etc.
- difficulty in forming sentences or recalling the name of familiar objects/people

Rarely does an individual display all of these characteristics. Each person's learning disability is unique and each person has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. There is no such thing as a learning disability. Rather, there are many learning disabilities.

Cause

At the present time, the cause of a learning disability usually remains unidentified. While the condition is commonly presumed to be

the result of a neurological dysfunction, why or how the dysfunction occurred typically is unknown. Since it is frequently impossible to identify the exact cause of the problem, school personnel focus on ways to help the student learn rather than on the cause of the problem.

Outlook

Learning disabilities has been recognized as a condition requiring special attention only within the last fifteen to twenty years. Prior to this time, individuals with learning disabilities and their families had to deal with the problems on their own. Assistance for individuals with learning disabilities and their families, whether from private or public agencies, was either not available or very limited in availability. Some of these individuals managed to overcome their disabilities while others were identified as mentally retarded, behavior problems, or slow learners, and were provided programs that may not have been appropriate. Still others dropped out of school, were forced out of school, or were simply passed from grade to grade.

Circumstances have changed. Schools are required to, and do, provide special programs and services specifically intended for students with learning disabilities. These individuals are being identified sooner and special assistance from the schools is being provided earlier. More effective approaches to teaching have been developed, and students with learning disabilities are being helped to overcome their specific learning problems and disabilities. As a result, the learning disabled have a better opportunity for success in school and in their adult lives.

Also, people have and continue to become more aware and better informed about learning disabilities, and attitudes toward individuals with learning disabilities are improving. Special arrangements can be made for persons with learning disabilities to take college admission tests. Colleges, universities, and vocational/technical schools have begun to provide special services for individuals with learning disabilities and even some companies and employers are willing to make adjustments or accommodations for employees with learning disabilities.

While much progress has been made in understanding learning disabilities and knowing what to do about the special problems created by learning disabilities, many questions remain unanswered and some issues remain unresolved. Defining learning disabilities continues to be a problem as do procedures for identifying children with learning disabilities. Debate continues on which approaches are best in teaching these individuals, and questions about the cause and treatment of learning disabilities continue to be raised. But

despite these problems and unanswered questions, we do know that if individuals with learning disabilities are provided appropriate educational programs and experiences that minimize their weaknesses and disabilities, and emphasize their strengths and abilities, these individuals can better realize their life goals.

CHAPTER 2

REFERRAL, EVALUATION, AND DECISION MAKING
OR
HOW SCHOOLS IDENTIFY STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Referral

A referral begins the procedure for obtaining a comprehensive educational evaluation. The referral is usually made by a child's classroom teacher or parent when there is concern that the child is not learning to potential. A referral can also be made by the school counselor, school nurse, principal, or any other member of the school staff who has direct contact with the child. The referral form states the reason for referral, describes the specific problems or concerns, and summarizes any interventions that have been tried in an effort to resolve the problems.

In some schools, the principal, the child's teacher, other appropriate school personnel, and the support staff from the area education agency meet to review referrals from staff members. The referral is discussed to determine if the existing problem can be resolved at the classroom level or whether a comprehensive evaluation is needed.

If a comprehensive evaluation is necessary, you are contacted and the reasons for the referral are explained to you. At some point, you are given a "consent form" to sign which gives the school permission to test and evaluate your child.

This form states the reason for referral and explains the evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation cannot be done without your permission (signed consent). If you agree to the evaluation, you must sign the consent form and return it to the school. The evaluation can then take place.

Evaluation

There is no charge for the comprehensive educational evaluation. All information obtained from the evaluation is available to you and no outside agency or individual can obtain the information without your written consent.

The comprehensive evaluation is done by members of the local school staff and personnel from the area education agency. Each part of the comprehensive evaluation plays an important role in assessing the needs of your child and in deciding the most appropriate assistance. The evaluation usually will include assessments in the following areas:

Adaptive Behavior - This refers to how well a child meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his/her age group. It typically includes a review of the child's records, interviews with the classroom teacher(s), observations, and assessment of social functioning. Parent interviews and home visits may be included.

Motor Functioning - Fine motor skills (how the child holds a pencil or scissors, tracing and writing skills, etc.) and gross motor skills (like running and jumping) are screened by a member(s) of the diagnostic-educational team. An in-depth evaluation is given if it is necessary.

Psychological Evaluation - The school psychologist administers an individual intelligence test. This test indicates the intellectual ability of the child.

Educational Evaluation - A special education teacher or consultant, or school psychologist assesses the child's current academic performance or achievement. This part of the education includes both standardized and informal measures of academic performance.

Speech and Language Evaluation - The speech clinician screens speech and language development by reviewing records, interviewing teachers, or giving a short test. An in-depth evaluation is conducted if necessary.

Hearing and Vision Evaluation - The child's records are reviewed and the child's vision is checked. Hearing screening is usually done by an audiologist. Follow-up evaluations are done if needed.

Health History - The school nurse or a member of the diagnostic-educational team reviews the child's cumulative school record and conducts an interview with you to obtain information regarding the child's past and present health.

Social Functioning - The school social worker or another member(s) of the diagnostic-educational team conducts observations and interviews to obtain information regarding the child's social development and emotional adjustment. This may include parent interviews and home visits.

Staffing

After the evaluation is completed, you are contacted to arrange a time for a staffing. The staffing is a meeting attended by you and the individuals involved in the evaluation.

The staffing team may include some or all of the following participants:

- you
- the school principal
- your child's classroom teacher
- a special education teacher
- the school counselor
- the school psychologist
- the school social worker
- the special education consultant
- the speech/language clinician
- the school nurse

The purpose of the staffing is to discuss the findings of the evaluation, your child's strengths and weaknesses, and his/her educational needs. You should ask questions and share your observations and concerns. After a thorough discussion, the group decides if your child is learning disabled and requires special education services. The group then makes specific recommendations regarding goals for your child and determines the appropriate program for him or her.

You are a very important member of this group and play an important role in the decision making. If it is decided that your child should receive special education services, you must sign a consent for placement form. You can request a copy of the staffing report which summarizes the information presented at the staffing and lists the specific recommendations.

CHAPTER 3

THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM OR WHAT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THE SCHOOL WILL PROVIDE

An Individualized Education Program—IEP—is written for each student with a learning disability who requires a special education program or special education services. The IEP is a written document describing the educational program of your child. The purpose of the IEP is to assure that students with disabilities receive special educational services planned according to their individual needs. You have an important role in preparing your child's individualized education program.

The IEP

An IEP must include the following:

1. your child's present levels of performance in each identified area requiring special education instruction or service;

2. the annual goals of your child's program for each area of special education instruction or service (annual goals describe what your child will be taught—the desired outcomes of the program);

3. the short-term instructional objectives for each annual goal (the objectives are measurable steps that lead to the achievement of each goal);

4. the special education instructional program and support services that will be provided your child;

5. when special education instruction and services will begin and how long the instruction and services will be provided, including the frequency and amount of time for each support service;

6. the extent to which your child will participate in the regular education program; and

7. how progress on the short-term instructional objectives will be evaluated (frequently included as part of the instructional objectives rather than as a separate item).

The IEP Conference

The writing of the IEP is a team effort. The purpose of the IEP conference is to ensure that each individual involved with your child understands his or her strengths, special needs, the intended outcomes of the program, the special services that will be provided, and individual responsibilities for providing services. The following people should participate in the IEP meeting:

1. you (both parents, if possible),
2. your child, if appropriate,
3. the special education teacher,
4. your child's classroom teacher(s),
5. the school principal or his/her designee,
6. a representative of the area education agency,
7. any other individuals who you or the school believe should attend such as the counselor, speech/language clinician, or social worker, etc; you can have a friend, relative or another parent attend the meeting with you.

The local school is responsible for arranging and conducting meetings to develop, review, and revise the IEP. Every effort should be made to schedule the meeting at a time and place you can attend. Mothers and fathers should attend the IEP conference. Don't hesitate to suggest times that are convenient for each of you and your work schedules, such as an early morning meeting before classes start, a noon meeting, or a late afternoon or evening meeting. The meetings are usually held at the school, but arrangement can be made to meet somewhere else. IEP conferences for a newly identified child must be held within 30 days of determining the child's need for a special education program.

You should take an active part in writing the IEP. Prepare yourself for the IEP conference so that you can be an active participant rather than just a receiver of information or observer by doing the following before the conference:

** Visit and observe your child's classroom.

** Review your child's education records.

** Prepare a list of any questions you want answered.

** Prepare a list of any problems or concerns you want to have discussed.

** Prepare a list of any suggestions you have for the IEP—areas you think need to be addressed or included in your child's program.

During the conference, don't hesitate to ask questions, ask for more detailed explanations, ask individuals to define or explain terms, share what you know about your child, and suggest areas or goals and objectives to be included in the IEP. Take responsibility for a goal or objective that you think you can help your child with at home, but don't agree to be responsible for areas or activities that you don't think you can do. Take notes during the meeting if you wish, but don't allow the notetaking to interfere with your participation and contribution to the conference.

When the IEP is completed, read it thoroughly to make sure the needs of your child are being met. Ask for explanations about anything you don't understand or is unclear, and request a copy for your records.

IEP REVIEWS

Your child's IEP must be reviewed annually. The annual review of the IEP is usually held in the spring, but it may be held any time throughout the year. The purpose of the review is to discuss your child's progress and make any necessary changes or revisions to your child's program. Prepare for and participate in these review meetings as noted previously. Review meetings can be held more frequently if requested by you or the school.

Good communication skills will assist you in the IEP meeting. Good listening skills are essential and made easier when you feel prepared.

Tips for Good Communication

1. Listen very carefully to everything that is said. If you are thinking about what you'll be saying, you can't listen very well. Try not to think about being nervous.

2. If you become upset or angry at a particular comment or discussion topic, try breathing deeply and slowly.

3. If you are unable to listen any more, stop the meeting to discuss your feelings. Take a friend or knowledgeable parent to the IEP meeting to help take notes or address issues when you feel too close to or emotional about the subject.

4. State simply and clearly what you have observed and what you want.

5. Before the meeting, make a list of topics you want to discuss.

6. If you are unsure of what you want, ask questions and summarize the responses until everyone understands and is in agreement.

7. Keep everyone on task. If someone brings up an unrelated issue, explain that you would be happy to discuss it with them at a later time. If you get off the track, apologize and return to the topic.

Parents should review the IEP to determine the new skills and information their child will be learning. If parents believe the skills being taught are not appropriate for their child's needs, an IEP meeting should provide the forum for them to explain their concerns,and suggest programming alternatives.

If the school refuses to change, parents can take a variety of advocacy steps, including negotiating with the AEA director of special education or, as a last resort, requesting a due process hearing. A parent should not agree to an IEP without understanding what will be taught. Nor should a parent fail to take action when common sense suggests the program is inappropriate.

**NOTE: The following article is reprinted with permission from the March-April, 1983, issue of the Iowa ACLD Newsletter.

ABOUT THAT IEP

Aside from the basic elements required by law (e.g., annual goals, short term objectives, etc.) a parent should also request the following info before signing an IEP.

1. Where is your child every minute of the day? Knowing you child is in 4th grade tells you little. But learning that most of his classes will be in the temporary building out back and that he will have recess after the nonhandicapped students are back in class tells you a lot.

2. Has the teacher ever worked with a child like yours? A teacher being "licensed," "certified" and/or "qualified" is not an accurate answer.

3. Is an aide available? If so, what is the aide's training? More importantly, what are the aide's other duties? An aide does not increase individual attention if the aide has no training, has responsibilities that are clerical or has to be on call for other classrooms.

4. Does the proposed program actually exist? Sometimes elaborately described programs exist only on paper. Accept only if experience leads you to trust the school district. If the program does exist, observe it before signing the IEP.

5. If the classroom is supposed to be self-contained, how many other children will be present at any one time? Sometimes a self-contained classroom also doubles as a resource room for other students. Schools don't consider these additional students as part of the class because they're not there all day.

6. What are the ages of the other children? What are their disabilities? Their functional ranges? If everyone else functions below your child's level, your child is not likely to get needed attention or stimulation for progress. When you ask these questions about other children, don't be put off by the answer that the school can't provide information because it would violate the other children's right of privacy.

7. How does the proposed program differ from what your child has been in before, or what you have been offered before? You may discover the school has a new label for a program you've rejected.

8. Is the academic program being offered comparable to the school's regular academic program? Is your child being offered all the courses available to nonhandicapped students? Is your child's day as long as everyone else's?

9. What is the level of instruction in each class? Will it be at a level to stimulate your child?

10. How is the instruction designed to meet your child's unique needs? If there is, for example, an auditory perception problem, how will that be addressed in each class and activity, by each person that comes in contact with your child?

IF THE IEP WAS WRITTEN PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCE, OR HAS MIMEOGRAPHED INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES, THERE WILL PROBABLY BE NO SPECIAL ATTENTION TO YOUR CHILD'S SPECIAL NEEDS.

You and the Law
Reed Martin
ACLD Newsbriefs
No. 130 J/F 1980

**NOTE: The following material is excerpted from "School Conferences - Be in Control," an article by Maureen C. Oviatt that originally appeared in the December, 1983, issue of the, Iowa ACLD Newsletter.

Does the thought of going to a school conference make you break out in a cold sweat? Does sitting through a conference make you feel like you're on the proverbial carpet? Do you feel out-numbered, outwitted and end up out-of-control?

Although we're adults, there is a child lurking inside each of us. That child is intimidated when faced with old authority figures. Recognizing that part of our personality is an important step toward dealing with school situations today.

When you go to a school conference, leave that child at home. Do bring along self-confidence and self-control. And, although it's difficult, try to insulate yourself from parental emotions which can turn a school conference into a classroom confrontation.

Here are some tips to help your self-confidence.

DRESS FOR DETERMINATION

Clothes not only affect how you feel about yourself, they influence how others react to you. Aim for an in-control, business-like look. The idea isn't so much to intimidate as it is to make certain that you make a positive first impression that lasts.

BRING ALONG A NOTEBOOK

Prepare for the conference by writing down questions and subjects you want to discuss.

During the conference use the notebook to take notes . . . keeping a written account of a meeting is an accepted practice in any business conference. And that's what you're conducting—BUSINESS! Very important business!

JOUSTING WITH JARGON

Jargon is the dialect of professionals. Like any foreign language, jargon can be threatening as well as intimidating for those who don't speak it. Unless you . . . understand it, (ask) that jargon be translated.

If you're too embarrassed to admit you don't understand the jargon, simply ask the teacher to be more specific.

DEALING WITH DELAYS

During the conference, if you are promised something—another evaluation, for example--ask for details. Who is going to do the evaluation? More importantly, WHEN?

Use you notebook to record the answers.

After the conference, (you may want to) write a follow-up letter detailing what was promised and when. Send the letter to the (principal or) teacher, keep a copy for your records, and mail carbon copies to other educational personnel who might be involved.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED

Once a child is identified as having a learning disability and requires special education services, the staffing team develops an IEP and determines the most appropriate educational placement for the child. Both Iowa and Federal law require that the child be served in the least restrictive environment possible. This means that the child is to participate in the regular education program to the extent appropriate in light of the chld's abilities and educational needs. Several options are available depending on the nature and severity of the learning disability. The following programs are available kindergarten through high school.

1. Regular Education Program

   - intended for the student with mild disabilities.
   - student remains in the regular classroom.
   - student may receive services through regular education personnel such as the guidance counselor, Chapter I programs, special projects, tutoring, or classroom aides.
   - modifications may be made within the regular program such as adjusting assignments, altering teaching methods and materials, and modifying testing procedures and performance requirements.
   - classroom teachers may receive consultative services from special education personnel.

In most cases of this nature, an IEP is not developed since special education services are not required.

2. Regular Education Program with Special Education Supplemental Assistance

   - intended for the student with mild disabilities.
   - student remains in regular classroom.
   - special adaptations or assistance provided through special education such as intensive short-term special education instructional intervention, educational aides, special materials, or specialized or modified instructionally related equipment for use in school.
   - IEP is developed describing service.

3. Resource Teaching Program (also referred to as resource room, resource program, resource center, or learning center)

- intended for the student with mild to moderate disabilities who needs an individualized instructional program to supplement the regular classroom program.

- student remains in regular classroom for a majority of the day.

- student receives instruction from the resource room teacher for at least an average of 30 minutes a day, but for less than half a day; the instruction may be provided in the resource room, the regular classroom, or a combination of the two options.

- resource teacher works with students in small groups or individually.

- maximum number of 18 students may be served.

- resource teacher assists the classroom teacher in modifying classroom assignments, materials, and teaching and testing procedures.

4. Special Class with Integration

- intended for the student with moderate disabilities who need more time for special instruction than can be provided by the resource teaching program.

- student receives direct instruction in the special class usually for more than 2 hours of the day, but not the full day.

- student is integrated into the regular classroom for subject areas where successful learning can occur.

- student is typically integrated with peers for physical education, music, art, and extracurricular activities.

- maximum number of 12 students at the elementary level and 15 at the secondary level may be served.

- special education teacher coordinates the integration and assists classroom teachers in making instructional adjustments and modifications.

5. Self-Contained Special Class With Little Integration

- intended for the student with moderate to severe disabilities who needs intensive, specialized instruction.
- student receives direct instruction in the special class for most of the school day.
- student usually attends regular physical education, art, or music classes.
- special education teacher assumes the primary responsibility for the student's educational program.
- enrollment is 8 students at the elementary level and 10 students at the secondary level.

6. Self-Contained Special Class

- intended for the student with severe disabilities who needs an intensive, specialized instructional program.
- student does not or rarely participate in regular classroom programs.
- enrollment is 5 students with a teacher and an aide.

7. Special School Placement

- intended for the few students with severe learning disabilities who need a more structured program than a public school special education program can offer.
- when a self-contained special class placement cannot meet a student's needs, a special, private, or residential school placement may be considered.

At the present time, there are no special schools for students with learning disabilities in the state of Iowa. Tuition for an out-of-state placement can be provided if there is no appropriate program in the state and the placement is recommended by the staffing team.

In addition to the above program options, many school districts provide alternative school programs at the high school level. For some students with learning disabilities, participation in these programs may be appropriate.

CHAPTER 5

PARENT AND STUDENT RIGHTS*

As the parent of a child who is receiving special education benefits, you have certain rights which are safeguarded by state and federal laws. You should have received a listing of your rights prior to your child being evaluated and placed in special programming. You should also be given a copy whenever the staffing team recommends a significant change in the services your child is to receive.

This may seem like a lot of duplication, but we want you to be well informed. Being informed will allow you to advocate most effectively for your child.

Parent and student rights are listed below. In addition to the rights, a brief explanation highlighting some of the major concepts is given.

Consent

You have the right to:

1. **give consent before an initial evaluation is conducted and before initial placement is made in special education;**

2. **withhold or revoke consent. The agency has the right to proceed in the absence of consent to a hearing to determine if your child should be initially evaluated or placed.**

Notice

You have the right to:

1. **notice before the agency initiates or changes (or refuses to initiate or change) the identification, evaluation or placement of your child;**

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* These rights may be found at 45 Code of Federal Regulations Subsection 300.500 et seq. The format in which they appear is adapted from Educational Rights of Handicapped Children, Reed Martin, author.

2. have that notice in writing, in your native language or other principal mode of communication, at a level understandable to the general public;

3. have the notice describe the proposed action, explain why it is proposed, describe the options considered and explain why other options were rejected;

4. be notified of each evaluation procedure, test, record or report the agency will use as a basis for any proposed action.

Please note that the first time your child is referred for a special education evaluation and the first time your child receives a special program or service you must give your consent before the school can go ahead with its plans. If you do not give your consent, or if you withdraw it before the initial evaluation or placement has started, the school may appeal your decision by requesting a state level special education hearing to determine whether your child should be initially evaluated or placed in special education.

Once your child is in a special program or receiving support services (such as physical therapy or speech services), the procedure changes. Then, if the school wants to reevaluate or change the special program, they must give you written notice of their intended actions with an opportunity to appeal. If you do not object within a reasonable amount of time (usually 30 days), they will carry out their plans. If you do not agree with the recommended changes it will be your responsibility to appeal by requesting a state-level special education hearing.

Many school districts and area education agencies will ask for your consent whenever they want to evaluate your child or change your child's program. However, after the initial evaluation and initial placement, consent is not required by law. After initial evaluation and initial placement, the responsibility to appeal any difference of opinion between the parents and school shifts to the parent.

Evaluation Procedures

You have the right to:

1. have a full and individual evaluation of your child's educational needs;

2. have more than one criterion used in determining an appropriate educational program for your child;

3. **have the evaluation performed by a multidisciplinary team (a group of individuals, including at least one teacher or specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability);**

4. **have your child assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability;**

5. **have a reevaluation every three years or more frequently if conditions warrant it or if you or your child's teacher request it.**

The point to emphasize about educational evaluation is that no one test score or no one person can determine that your child requires special services. You and the team of professionals must look at many different areas including your child's health history, social skills, psychological and educational functioning, vision, language, speech and hearing. This assessment information will then be used to determine whether your child requires special education.

The evaluation must be updated at least every three years and more often if necessary.

Independent Evaluation

You have the right to:

1. **be told where an independent evaluation may be obtained at no expense or low expense;**

2. **have the independent evaluation considered when placement and program decisions are made;**

3. **be told the procedures for obtaining an independent evaluation at public expense and the conditions under which such an evaluation may be obtained;**

4. **an independent evaluation at public expense if the agency's evaluation is determined to be inappropriate.**

As a parent you may have questions about the validity of the evaluation of your child or you may simply want a second opinion. You have the right to obtain an independent evaluation and have that information considered by the staffing team in making any programming decisions about your child. In some instances, the independent evaluation may be done at public expense.

A key to getting a good independent evaluation is finding a facility that can provide sound educational recommendations. While a

prestigious medical center, for instance, may provide excellent medical information, that information may have very limited use in programming educationally for the child. Also, some facilities, especially out-of-state facilities, may not be familiar with Iowa's criteria or delivery system. Thus, their recommendations are not practical back in the home district. Department of Education personnel would be glad to discuss options for independent evaluation with you.

Least Restrictive Environment

You have the right to:

1. **have your child educated with nonhandicapped children to the maximum extent appropriate;**

2. **have your child removed from the regular educational environment only if supplementary aids and services have been determined to be unsatisfactory.**

3. **have a variety of program options so that removal from the regular environment can be the least necessary deviation;**

4. **have placement in the school your child would attend if nonhandicapped unless the individual education program requires some other arrangement;**

5. **have your child participate with nonhandicapped children in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities such as meals, recess, P.E., counseling, clubs, athletics and special interest groups to the maximum extent appropriate.**

What is least restrictive but still appropriate for your child must be determined on an individual basis. Remember that a child sitting in a regular classroom but frustrated and embarrassed by not being able to do the work can feel more isolated than one who is receiving special services in another room. We want to strive for integration with nonhandicapped peers that is meaningful—that will offer your child a chance to grow and expand with improved self-concept.

Records

You have the right to:

1. **inspect and review your child's educational records;**

2. **ask for an explanation of any item in the records;**

3. have copies made at a reasonable cost;

4. be informed of types and locations of records being collected or used by the agency;

5. ask for the amendment of any record if you feel it is inaccurate, misleading or violates privacy rights;

6. a records hearing if the agency does not make the requested amendment;

7. give or withhold consent to disclose your child's records;

8. be told to whom information has been disclosed;

9. be informed before information in your child's file is to be destroyed;

10. respond in writing to any information in the record and have the response become a part of the record.

We want to emphasize that you have the right to inspect all your child's educational records and have a copy made at a reasonable cost. Some schools will want a professional to review the records with you in order to explain some of the more technical assessment information or answer any questions you may have.

If you feel any information in the record is inaccurate, misleading or violates your family's privacy rights, you can ask for an amendment of the record. If the agency does not amend the record at your request, you can initiate a local records hearing and attach an addendum to the record which states your position.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act Regulations, the Iowa Rules of Special Education, and the Privacy Rights of Parents and Students Regulations all govern the handling of special education student records. For further information on this, contact the Iowa Department of Education (DE).

Hearings

You have the right to:

1. request an impartial due process hearing to question the agency's identification, evaluation or placement of your child, or to question the agency's provision of a free appropriate public education;

2. be told of any free or low-cost legal and other relevant services available;

3. have a hearing decision from an unbiased hearing officer;

4. see a statement of the qualifications of the hearing officer;

5. be advised and accompanied at the hearing by counsel and to be accompanied by individuals with special knowledge or training in problems of the handicapped;

6. have your child present;

7. have the hearing open or closed to the public;

8. present evidence and confront, cross-examine and compel the attendance of witnesses;

9. prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed at least five days before the hearing;

10. have a copy of a tape recording of the hearing;

11. obtain written findings of fact and a written decision within 45 days after the DE receives the initial request for the hearing;

12. have a hearing set at a reasonably convenient time;

13. appeal a decision from the hearing officer in court;

14. have your child remain in his or her present educational placement while the administrative proceedings are pending, unless you and the agency agree otherwise.

15. be advised that attorney's fees may be reimbursed under certain circumstances.

In Iowa, to request a hearing, a notorized document clearly and concisely stating the issues must be sent to the State Director of Education, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

With these rights come certain responsibilities for you the parents and for the school system. Both you and the school are responsible for keeping the communication channels open for the purpose of improving your child's education. We urge you as parents to become actively involved in the development of your child's individual education program (IEP). Talk with your child's teacher, principal or AEA director of special education if you have concerns or questions.

CHAPTER 6

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD

An advocate is a person who supports the rights and needs of individuals who are unable or less able to do it for themselves. As a parent, you are the natural advocate for your child.

As an advocate for your child, you need to be informed and assertive. It is important for you to know your rights and your child's rights. In advocating for services for your child, be assertive, be persistent, and be prepared to speak, to listen, and to ask questions.

Before you go to any school conference (staffing, IEP meeting, parent-teacher conference), take a look at yourself. Are you standing straight? Do you look cheerful and relaxed? Does your clothing give the appearance you are there on business? If so, you are ready to make a positive impression.

Take a notebook along with you to the conference. You should have written down any pertinent questions and subjects you wish to cover. Take notes during the meeting. Be sure to ask questions if you do not understand what is being aid. Below are some questions that should be answered during the course of the conference or that you should ask.

Initial Staffing and IEP Meeting

(First meeting following initial comprehensive evaluation)

** What tests and evaluation activities were conducted?

** What were the results of these tests and activities?

** What are my child's specific strengths and abilities? Specific weaknesses and disabilities?

** Was the evaluation complete, comprehensive? Are there any areas that were not evaluated that should be evaluated?

** Are there any questions about the accuracy of any of the findings? Why? Is there a need for further evaluation? Why?

** What does the evaluation indicate as far as diagnosis and need for special education services?

** What kind of programs and services are available for my child? Which program, service, or combination of programs is most appropriate for my child? Why?

** Is the program or service being recommended the "least restrictive" for my child? Why?

** How frequently will my child attend the program or receive the service? Once a day? Once a week?

** Will my child be out of the regular class to get help? If so, for how long and what subjects or classes will be missed? Will my child be held responsible for any classroom work/ assignments missed? If so, who will help my child with the work, and when and how is the work to be done completed?

** What kind of training and experience have the individuals (teachers, teacher aides, etc.) had who will work with my child?

** How often will I get reports about my child's progress? From whom?

** Will my child's regular classroom program be modified? If so, how and who is responsible? If not, why not?

** If my child is to participate in a special education class, what kind of problems do the other children exhibit? Are their problems and needs similar to those of my child? How many children are enrolled in the program?

** What are the goals and objectives of my child's special education program? How will his/her progress be evaluated?

** What can I do to help?

** When will the next conference for reviewing progress be scheduled?

** If you do not agree with the diagnosis or educational plan:

* Where can I get an independent educational evaluation for a second opinion?

* Will the school district or area education agency pay for the independent evaluation? Why or why not?

* What are my rights of appeal?

** At the conclusion of the meeting:

* Ask for a copy of the staffing report.

* Ask for a copy of your child's IEP.

* Get to know your child's teachers and any other personnel working with your child.

* Visit the special education classroom.

* Keep communication channels with the school open.

Annual IEP Review Meetings

** What were my child's levels of performance a year ago?

** What are my child's levels of performance now?

** How has my child's performance changed, improved? How was this determined?

** How should the IEP be changed? If no change, why not?

** Will the program or placement be changed? Why? Can he or she be moved to a less restrictive program? Why or why not?

** Is there any aspect of my child's program that doesn't appear to be working or isn't successful? If so, what needs to be done?

** Is there anything I should be doing to help?

** At the conclusion of the meeting, request a copy of the IEP.

Attitudes and Support

At any school conference it is important for you to be objective. You should present your concerns based on facts, not just feelings. Try to create a positive, sharing atmosphere and don't let emotions ruin the conference. If you feel yourself becoming angry or defensive, try to change the topic to a more positive one until you regain control. Do not allow yourself to argue because that usually doesn't accomplish anything. If others are being extremely negative or accusatory, keep a close record in your notebook of what is being said. Always keep control of yourself. If you do, you are in control of the situation. Remember, your aim is to see that you all end up on the same "team" so your child can receive the most appropriate education.

Sometime you may want the support and help of another person. This person could be a relative, a friend, or a personal advocate. The Iowa Assocation for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities has an advocacy committee that includes parents, educators, and attorneys who have been specially trained. These individuals are available to provide you with needed information and can arrange for a trained advocate to assist you.

NOTE: **The following article is reprinted from Sharing Connection, Volume 1, Number 2, Spring 1985. The Sharing Connection is a newsletter published by the Nebraska Department of Education, Special Education Branch, in cooperation with the Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, and the Nebraska Human Services Consortium.**

COMMUNICATING WITH PROFESSIONALS

Many parents feel intimidated when talking with teachers and other special education professionals. There is much in our society which encourages us to look to professionals and accept what they say without question. Here are some suggestions for avoiding an intimidated feeling and being successful in your communication with school people.

1. Each time you have contact with school people, remind yourself that you are important and have a right to be involved.

2. Prepare for meetings. Know ahead of time the important points you want to make. Make a list and take it with you.

3. If possible, take someone with you—to take notes, help you make a point,, or provide whatever other form of support you need.

4. When you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

5. Learn to communicate assertively, rather than passively or aggressively. An assertive person clearly states his/her point of view and takes into account what others have to say. People generally respect an assertive person. A passive person discounts his/her point of veiw and defers to the other person. People learn that they can take advantage of a passive person. An aggressive person discounts others and insists on what he/she wants. Others may feel forced to do what the aggressive person wants but will often feel angry about doing it. The aggressive person teaches others to fear and avoid him/her.

6. At meetings, let your nonverbal behavior tell others that you know you belong on the team. Examples: Look at people when you talk to them. Take notes. Sit at the table with other participants, not back in your chair like an observer.

7. If you say some of what you wanted to say, but not all of it, don't be hard on yourself. Like other skills, assertive communication develops with practice. Congratulate yourself for taking the first steps! (If a major problem will result because of what you didn't say, find out what you can do to get that information included.)

8. It's important to stand up for your rights and those of your child. It's also often necessary to compromise. It will help to think carefully about your priorities for your child. Of all the things you want, which are most important? Which are you willing to negotiate about?

9. When you have a complaint, discuss it first with the person directly involved. If that doesn't produce results, then go to someone higher up. You will help your own credibility by giving the person involved a chance to make changes before going to a supervisor.

10. Let the school hear from you when you're pleased with what they'are doing, not just when you have a problem or complaint. We all apprecaite positive feedback, and it can create a "reservoir of good will" to help you if problems do arise.

11. Continue to remind yourself that what you have to say is important. If necessary, remind other people that you have a legal right to be included in decisions about your child's education.

**NOTE: The following article is reprinted with permission from the February, 1984, issue of the Iowa ACLD Newsletter.

DID THEY SAY "STAFFED-OUT"

QUESTIONS PARENTS SHOULD ASK WHEN THE LD STUDENT IS BEING STAFFED-OUT!!!!!!!

1. Does the student no longer have a specific learning disability that requires special education.

2. Explain the initial placement in the LD program for a better understanding of why the student is ready to be staffed-out now.

3. What is the student's current level of functioning?

4. What evidence exists to verify that the student is able to handle the demands of the regular classroom?

5. Will instruction in the regular classroom be given at the student's level of functioning or achievement?

6. What if the student needs special education services again? Can he or she get back into the LD program? Does a waiting list exist?

7. Will the LD teacher continue to monitor the student's progress?

8. How much direct instruction does the student receive from the LD teacher to finish assignments?

9. How much time does the student work independently while in the resource classroom?

10. Once in the regular classroom, will the student receive some type of one-to-one or small-group instruction in the student's "weak" areas?

11. How much adjustment does the regular classroom curriculum need to meet the student's needs? Will this be done?

12. Will the student have the structure, firmness and stability necessary to cope without a special education teacher?

13. Can a review date be set to assess the student's transition and progress in the regular classroom?

reprinted from the
Polk County ACLD
Newsletter

CHAPTER 7

TIPS FOR PARENTS

All of your feelings upon hearing your child has a learning disability are perfectly normal reactions. Perhaps you are surprised, amazed, confused, shocked, denying it's really true, and maybe even angry. You are angry with the school, angry with the teachers, angry with your child, and maybe even angry with yourself. Relax! Your just normal! It's time to work through all those feelings, understand them, and finally come to the conclusion that your child learns differently and needs some special help. You must seek ways to teach to your child's strengths, to compensate for weaknesses, and to get over the shock of having to put a label on your child in order to receive special services. What is best for your child—that's the bottom line.

There are two myths parents must recognize and come to grips with. One is that your child is retarded, dumb. Not true. Remember, individuals with learning disabilities have average to superior intelligence; a genius may have a learning disability. Your child has strengths and unique abilities. Learn to capitalize on them.

The other myth is that your child will outgrow the problem. Not true. Learning disabilities tend to be permanent and persist throughout life. Given support and an appropriate educational program, your child will probably learn to captialize on strengths, resolve some problems or difficulties, and compensate or cope with the other disabilities.

Living with a child with a learning disability may not always be easy. Difficulties will arise, family life may be disrupted at times, and problems you thought had been resolved may reoccur. Following are some suggestions that should prove helpful as you and your child live and grow together.

** Accept your child's learning difficulties as continual or ongoing; the first school staffing doesn't resolve the difficulty which can spill over into all aspects of life.

** Help develop your child's positive self-image; tell your child what's right with him/her; find areas in which your child can excel and receive praise—encourage your child to be active in these areas and give praise when deserved.

** Give your child the time and attention he/she needs, but don't neglect siblings and other family members; perhaps the scheduling of time for each sibling would be helpful.

** Be open about your child's learning difficulties with all family members; don't try to keep it secret, rather discuss it.

** Set up rules and limits for your child and be sure the rules and expectations are understood; consistency in discipline is important; when disciplining, don't be insulting, sarcastic, or threatening; focus on the unacceptable behavior or action rather than the child.

** Make certain that confrontations with your child are about important issues; don't always be "on his/her back."

** Do not coddle or be overly protective—your child must learn to take responsibilities for his/her actions/behavior and accept the consequences.

** Allow, even encourage your child to try his/her wings; if there is failure, discuss it, help him/her learn from it, and try again.

** Set up a schedule for doing chores, studying, eating, playing, and TV watching; LD children often need this structure and an established routine can avoid many hassles.

** School can be stressful for a child with learning difficulties; be attentive to your child for subtle indications of stress and pressure; talk about it and work together in finding ways to relieve the pressure.

** Poor organization and forgetfulness are often characteristics of LD; be prepared to deal with the resulting problems in practical ways—such as selecting clothing the night before, providing a box at the door for books and school items which frequently become lost or misplaced, and putting your child's name on possessions.

** Be realistic about your child's strengths and weaknesses; don't ask or expect more than can really be done or accomplished; be ready to help when and where help is needed; but be sure not to let the learning difficulties become an excuse for not doing or trying.

** Contact Iowa ACLD if you need help in finding a listening ear or a source for advice and "on the spot" help.

** Don't feel guilty—you haven't caused the learning difficulty.

** Have courage; maintain a sense of humor; be patient and persistent; be good to yourself—treat yourself to occasional time away from your child—you need "R & R time" and time away can bring a new perspective.

Try to keep this thought from Leo Buscaglia (1978 ACLD International Conference Keynote Address) in mind:

> "A wonderful realization will be made the day you realize that you are unique in all the world. You are the marvelous combination of factors that will never occur again in the history of the world. You are the combination so that you can do what is essential for you to do. Don't believe you have nothing to contribute. The world is an incredible, unfulfilled tapestry, and only you can fulfill that tiny space as yours."
>
> Leo Buscaglia 1978
> ACLD International Conference

This applies to both you and your child.

The following article first appeared in the Iowa ACLD Newsletter, March-April, 1983, and is reprinted with permission of Iowa ACLD.

AS ALWAYS, BE ALERT

A parent of an LD child learns to practice patience. Time, professionals and educators say, can be an ally. But sometimes it acts as a frustrating adversary.

At home, there is the constant struggle to maintain discipline without forfeiting love. And the school year is spent living from conference to conference with a lot of worry in between.

Trips to the bookstore or the in-laws or even the luxury of having a second cup of coffee during the Phil Donahue Show can bombard parents with a confusing list of fix-its.

Our children are eating too much of one kind of food. Or, maybe not enough of another. As parents we are too lenient. Too strict. Or both.

Then, Phil Donahue comes bursting into our homes with a guest who has a book to tow which offers yet another theory and solution for learning disabilities.

And, of course, it is difficult for a parent to accept the logic of a world where someone has written a book on how to pottie train a toddler in 18 hours while a child can spend six years in school still reading on the second grade level.

Is it any wonder, then, that even a patient parent might be tempted to try one more thing to help their child?

But, when thinking of pursuing what sounds like a promising new treatment for the learning disabled, the patient parent must also be prudent. After all, it is the child who will be on the receiving end of the treatment.

In this age of experts, it is easy to be impressed by titles. And it's even easier for people to attach titles to their names. If a professional claims to be "certified"—find out exactly by whom. Be aware of the fact that the infamous professional merry-go-around offers very few brass rings.

To help parents evaluate services before paying for them, Nancy Goldberg, vice president for educational affairs of the Washington ACLD, suggests asking the following questions:

What are the credentials of the professional(s) involved? Degree, field of education, particular qualification that deem them an expert in LD and related problems, and length of time in this specialized field.

Do they make referrals to other professionals for help in other areas?

Is the professional willing to share evidence of the success of a particular method, e.g., research papers, studies, references, etc.

Also, ask about the financial details before contracting for services. Do a comparative cost study of similar/same services in the community.

CHAPTER 8

AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

A student with a learning disability may find it difficult to begin making plans for after high school. The decision of what to do after graduation is a difficult one for any individual. For the individual with a learning disability, the decision can be more difficult because of the disability. The immediate goals of passing required courses and graduating from high school often take much of the student's time and energy. Some individuals become extremely frustrated with school and may not consider additional training or schooling. Other individuals feel secure in school and may not want to make plans for the future because of changes and challenges that lie ahead. Regardless of the circumstance, the learning disabled individual needs the encouragement and support of parents in deciding what to do after graduation.

When considering the options available after high school, it is important to be realistic. Learning problems and associated difficulties do not suddenly disappear with graduation from high school. Both you and your child must be realistic about his or her maturity, independence, social skills, academic ability, and aspirations. While it is important not to underestimate your child's ability to pursue a certain career or lifestyle, it is just as important not to overestimate his or her ability.

Begin Early

The career development process is an ongoing, lifelong aspect of human existence. Every day you, as a parent, are teaching attitudes, positive or negative, toward different careers. You are teaching responsibility as well as actual skills that may later be transferred into the job market. Your school district should also be involved with career development.

It is important to know what your school district is doing with the career development of your child. This is especially important for the learning disabled student who chooses to go directly into the world of work from high school. Some questions you might ask are:

* What kind of career exposure does the school provide?
* What kind of vocational training programs does the school provide?
* What, specifically, is available in the vocational training area for my child?

* Does the school have a liaison contact with the area community college?

For those students choosing to enter the world of work directly after graduation, there are programs available to assist with the transition. Vocational training and life skills programs are available in junior and senior high school. In life skills training, your child would learn practical life skills, such as how to fill out application forms and tax forms, manage a checkbook, do comparative shopping, handle credit, find insurance, to mention just a few. In addition to the vocational programs offered locally, there may be a vocational program for those students still in high school in conjunction with the area community college. You should inquire about this program through your local school, nearest area community college, or your area education agency.

Options

When considering plans for after graduation, there are two basic options: immediately entering the work force or enrolling in a postsecondary program.

When deciding between the world of work and postsecondary education, you should first consider your child's interests and abilities. After areas of interests have been determined, you and your child can decide if further schooling is appropriate or necessary. It is often possible to channel a student's interests into an occupation in which he/she can be successful. Your child may not have the skills needed to become an airplane pilot, but could find a job in the airline industry that would provide success and prove satisfying. It is important not to set your child up for failure.

If it appears your child will pursue a postsecondary education, it is important to be attentive to the high school classes taken. Also, college admission tests may be required. Many learning disabled students do not test well and they fear taking college entrance exams. Special testing arrangements can be made for learning disabled students. The students may use a reader, audio cassettes, or arrange individual testing conditions with extended time. It is important to make such arrangements far in advance. For more information regarding the special arrangements for learning disabled students, contact the school counselor or principal, and request such information from:

** Admissions Testing Program for Handicapped Students
Box 2891
Princeton, New Jersey 08541

** ACT Test Administration
Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243

Students with learning disabilities can be found on campuses of large universities, small colleges, community colleges, and vocational or technical schools. If your child wants to pursue a post-high school education, begin your search by sending for catalogs and brochures. It is important to visit and examine several schools before deciding on which one to attend. Be honest with college admissions offices about your son's or daughter's learning problems. Ask questions and make sure that the services they offer meet your child's needs. Some colleges are particularly interested in students with learning disabilities and provide specific programs and assistance for those with specific learning needs. The appropriate school for your child may or may not have a special program for learning disabled students. It is more important to match your child's learning style with the teaching methods of the school.

Community colleges can be an appropriate choice for individuals with a learning disability. These schools offer vocational training programs as well as two-year academic programs. If the student is not ready for a four-year commitment, a two-year college may be the best alternative. Usually these credits can be transferred to a four-year college if the student decides he/she wants more schooling.

If a postsecondary program is considered an option, the following agencies, organizations, and materials will prove helpful:

** Time Out to Enjoy, Inc.
715 Lake Street, Suite 100
Oak Park, IL 60301
(312)383-9017

** Closer Look/Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth
1201 6th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202)822-7900

** Association for Children and Adults With Learning Disabilities, Inc.
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412)341-8077

** Guide to College Programs for Learning Disabled Students
available from National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 9933 Lawler Avenue, Suite 500, Skokie, IL 60077.

** A Guide to Post-Secondary Education Opportunities for the Learning Disabled available from Time Out to Enjoy, Inc. (see address above).

** A National Directory of Four Year Colleges, Two Year Colleges and Post High School Training Programs for Young People With Learning Disabilities available from Partners in Publishing, P.O. Box 50347, Tulsa, OK 74150.

** What Do You Do AFter High School? available from Skyer Consultation, Inc., P.O. Box 121, Rockaway Park, NY 11694.

** Campus Access for Learning Disabled Students available from Closer Look/Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth (see address above).

** A Guide to Colleges for Learning Disabled Students available from Academic Press, Inc., Attn: Commercial Sales Division, Orlando, FL 32887.

Learning disabled students often need to be "pushed out of the nest". They need to be encouraged to try things on their own. By this time, students with learning disabilities usually have developed fairly good coping skills. They often do better on their own than they or their parents would expect. The following support groups are available for adults with learning disabilities:

** Iowa Association for Children and Adults With Learning Disabilities, Youth and Adult Section

** Association for Children and Adults With Learning Disabilities, Inc., Youth and Adult Section
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412)341-1515

** National Network of Learning Disabled Adults
808 North 82 Street, Suite F2
Scottsdale, AZ 85257
(202)576-2331

** Time Out to Enjoy, Inc.
715 Lake Street, Suite 100
Oak Park, IL 60301
(312)383-9017

** Association of Learning Disabled Adults
P.O. Box 9722
Friendship Station
Washington, D.C. 20016

After high school, the parents' role is one of supporter rather than decision maker. You are now dealing with an adult. Your son or daughter will need much support during this transition time, but will need to take the responsibility for his or her own actions. As a parent, you have invested much of your time and energy in your learning disabled child. It will be hard for you to let go.

Remember, your child, even as an adult, will need your love, support, and encouragement.

CHAPTER 9

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

This chapter provides information on government agencies, organizations, information sources, and materials which should prove helpful to you. The information presented is but a beginning. You will want to add more information as you think necessary.

Government Agencies

**Iowa Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146
515/281-3176

Chief: J. Frank Vance

Consultant, Learning Disabilities: Jim Reese

Consultant, Administrative Services: Jerry D. Brown

**U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS)
330 "C" Street, SW
Switzer Building, Room 3626
Washington, D.C. 20202
202/732-1007

**Area Education Agency
Special Education Division

Please refer to AEA listing of special education directors on separate sheet appearing inside the back cover of this handbook.

**Iowa Department of Education
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Administrator: Jerry L. Starkweather
510 E. 12th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
515/281-4156

Organizations

**Iowa Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (IACLD)

**Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, Inc.
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15234
(412) 341-1515

**Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities (FCLD)
99 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10016
(212) 687-7211

**Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
1920 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091
(703) 620-3360

**The Orton Dyslexia Society
724 York Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21204
(301) 296-0232

**International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, Delaware 19714
(302) 731-1600

Information Sources

**National Information Center for Handicapped Children and Youth
(NICHCY)
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, D.C. 20013
(703) 528-8480

**Time Out to Enjoy, Inc.
715 Lake Street
Suite 100
Oak Park, Illinois 60301
(312) 383-9017

**Closer Look/Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth
1201 16th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 822-7900

Books

Anderson, W., Chitwood, S. & Hayden, D. (1982). Negotiating the special education maze: A guide for parents and teachers. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

A book explaining how parents can become advocates for their children.

Bever, S. & Van Ness, T. (1982). Building a child's self-image: A guide for parents. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities.

Brutten, M., Richardson, S. & Mangel, C. (1973). Something's wrong with my child. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Provides practical information on various aspects of raising children with learning disabilities; includes an appendix listing sources of help and recommended reading material.

Clarke, L.(1975). Can't read, can't write, can't takl too good either: How to recognize and overcome dyslexia in your child. New York: Penguin Books, Inc.

A mother describes her family's experiences in finding help for her son who has a severe language disbility.

Crosby, R. (1968). The waysiders. New York: Delacoste Press.

Cutler, B. (1981). Unraveling the special education maze. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Des Jardins, C. et al. (1980). How to get services by being assertive. Chicago, IL: Coordinating Council for Handicapped Children.

Ellingson, C. (1967). The shadow children. Chicago, IL: Professional Press.

Fisher, J. (1979). A parent's guide to learning disabilities. Totowa, NJ: Charles Scribners Sons.

A practicing school psychologist tells parents how to identify, deal with, and prevent learning disabilities and related problems.

Gordon, S. (1975). Living fully: A guide for young people with a handicap, their parents, their teachers and professionals. New York: John Day Publishing Co.

Greene, L. (1982). Kids who hate school. Rolling Hills Estates, CA: Palmar Press.

A handbook on learning disabilities that deals with parenting the learning disabled child, communicating with the school, building self-esteem, and other topics of interest to parents.

Howes, G., Weiss, H. & Weiss, M. (1980). How to raise your child to be a winner. New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, Inc.

A book of pleasant and encouraging reading written by parents of learning disabled children.

Jones, B. & Hart, J. (1968). Where's Hanna? A handbook for parents and teachers of children with learning disorders. New York: Hart Publishing Co.

An account by a parent who received inadequate guidance regarding her child's learning disability.

Levy, H. (1973). Square pegs, round holes: The learning disabled child in the classroom and at home. Boston: Little, Brown.

Presents a historical development of the concept of learning disabilities and discusses ways of handling the problems associated with learning disabilities.

Markel, G. & Greenbaum, J. (1979). Parents are to be seen and heard. San Luis Oblispo, CA: Impact Publishers.

McWhirter, J. (1977). The learning disabled child: A school and family concern. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

The author, a psychologist and parent of a child with a learning disability, addresses the psychological and educational problems accompanying a learning disability and the important role of the home and parents.

Osman, B. & Blinder, H. (1982). No one to play with: The social side of learning disabilities. New York: Random House.

This book gives examples and discusses the social problems some learning disabled children experience; discusses the family's reaction to such problems and gives suggestions for parents and teachers.

Osman, B. (1979). Learning disabilities: A family affair. New York: Warner Book, Inc.

This book provides recommendations for managing learning disabled children at home, in school, and in other situations.

Siegel, E., Siegel, R. & Siegel, P. (1978). Help for the lonely child: Strengthening social perceptions. New York: E. P. Dutton.

An easy-to-read book that is well indexed for quick reference; includes specific activities to help improve social perception.

Silver, L. (1984). The misunderstood child: A guide for parents of learning disabled children. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Smith, S. (1981). No easy answers: The learning disabled child at home and at school. New York: Bantam Books, Inc.

The author discusses common anxieties and frustrations experienced by learning disabled children, their parents, and their teachers and gives concrete advice on how to teach and live with the learning disabled child; a good introduction to the world of the learning disabled.

Smith, S. (1978). No easy answers: The learning disabled child. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Mental Health.

Stevens, J. (1980). The learning disabled child: Ways parents can help. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher.

Information on recognizing a learning disability, interpreting test results, and giving support at home without disrupting family life.

Wagner, R. (1979). Dyslexia and your child: A guide for parents and teachers. Scranton, PA: Harper and Row.

The author tells parents and teachers how to assist children in reading when adequate professional resources for remediation are not available.

Weiss, H. & Weiss, M. (1976). Home is a learning place: A parent's guide to learning disabilities. Boston: Little, Brown.

This book has encouraging suggestions for parents to use at home.

Wolraich, M., Fick, L., & Karagan, N. (1984). Your child's education: A school guide for parents. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Your Child's Education provides parents with information for considering the quality of their child's education and covers such topics as: "The Parent-Teacher Conference," "Curriculum," "Procedures in the Evaluation of Children with School Problems or Special Needs," "Learning Problems," "Behavior Problems," and "Medical Problems."

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ACLD - Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities

ADD - attention deficit disorder

AEA - area education agency

BD - behavioral disorders

CEC - Council for Exceptional Children

CLD - Council for Learning Disabilities

CNS - central nervous system

DE - Department of Education (formerly DPI, Department of Public Instruction)

FAPE - free appropriate public education

FCLD - Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities

IACLD - Iowa Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities

IEP - individualized education program

IQ - intelligence quotient

IRI - informal reading inventory

K-ABC - Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children

LD - learning disability(ies)

LEA - local education agency (local school district)

LRE - least restrictive environment

MBD - minimal brain dysfunction

OCR - Office of Civil Rights

OSERS - Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

P.L. 94-142 - Public Law 94-142, the Education for the Handicapped Act

PIAT - Peabody Individual Achievement Test

RTP - resource teaching program; also sometimes referred to as resource room, resource program, resource center, or learning center

SCI, SI, or SCIN - special class with integration

SEA - state education agency

SLD - specific learning disability(ies); also, specific language disorder

VAKT - visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile

WAIS - Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale

WISC or WISC-R - Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; the R stands for revised edition

NOTES